

TRUSTWORTHY COMMUNICATION:

Use of Statistics and Data in Government Communications

Suzanne Halls
October 2023

Outline

The role of OSR

Intelligent Transparency in Communications

**Collaboration between analysis and communications
functions**

Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR)

- **The regulatory arm of the UK Statistics Authority** – we regulate official statistics across the UK Statistical System
- **Promote and safeguard the production and publication of official statistics**
- **Independent of official statistics producers** - we do not produce statistics and are separate from the Office for National Statistics (ONS)

UK Statistical System

Parliamentary Bodies

UK Statistics Authority:
Chair and Authority Board

National Statistician
Official Statistics production

Director
General
Regulation

ONS

Government
departments
and agencies

Scottish
Government
Welsh
Government
NI Executive

Office for
Statistics
Regulation

User communities: meeting the public good

Our vision is that statistics serve the **public good**

In a world of abundant data, we want people to have confidence in statistics produced by the public sector

The Code of Practice for Statistics

Trustworthiness

Confidence in the people and organisations that produce statistics

Honesty & integrity

Independent decision making
& leadership

Orderly release

Transparent processes
& management

Professional capability

Data governance

Quality

Data and methods that produce assured statistics

Suitable data sources

Sound methods

Assured quality

Value

Statistics that support society's needs for information

Relevance to users

Accessibility

Clarity & insight

Innovation & improvement

Efficiency & proportionality

Giraffes









Casework



Ed Humpherson to Simon Palmer: Police funding infographic for Beating Crime Plan

Dear Simon

Police funding infographic for Beating Crime Plan

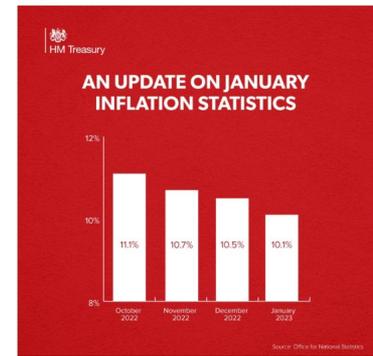
I am writing regarding a [statement issued on twitter](#) on December 16 showing overall annual police funding. The data are shown in nominal rather than real terms. Providing data in nominal terms gives the impression of a greater increase in police funding over time than would be seen if using real terms figures. While real terms figures would give a better sense of the increase felt by police forces, we recognise that real terms figures are not produced until July. Given the potential to mislead, the tweet should be clearer that the data are in nominal terms, and therefore do not take account of the changing value of money over time. Presenting the data without showing the full axis from zero also contributes to the impression of a greater increase.

Ed Humpherson to David Pares: Treasury Inflation Infographic

Dear David,

HM Treasury Chart on inflation

I am writing to you about a [graph](#) posted on the @HMTreasury Twitter timeline on 15 February that shows the annual inflation rates according to the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) from October 2022 to January 2023. This was an update to a similar [graph](#) posted on 19 January:



Ed Humpherson to Peter Schofield: Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Way to Work target and use of figures by government

Dear Peter

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Way to Work target and use of figures by government

In January 2022, DWP set a target to move 500,000 people into employment from Universal Credit Intensive Work Search or Job Seekers Allowance.

On the 30 June, DWP posted a [tweet](#) and [press release](#) claiming that over half a million people have been helped into work by the Way to Work campaign in 5 months, therefore reaching the above target. This figure was subsequently quoted in the House of Commons by the Prime Minister on 6 July.

Trustworthiness is at the core of what we do

How statistics are produced
We uphold the trustworthiness, quality and value of statistics and data used as evidence



Office for Statistics Regulation Guidance

**Guidance for Models:
Trustworthiness, Quality
and Value.**

How statistics are used
We protect the role of statistics in public debate



How statistics are valued
We develop a better understanding of the public good of statistics





Intelligent Transparency

Proactively taking an **open, clear and accessible** approach to the publication of data, statistics and wider analysis

Equality of access

Data used by government in the public domain should be made available to all in an accessible and timely way.

Enhancing understanding

Sources for figures should be cited and appropriate explanation of context, including strengths and limitations, communicated clearly alongside figures.

Independent Decision Making and Leadership

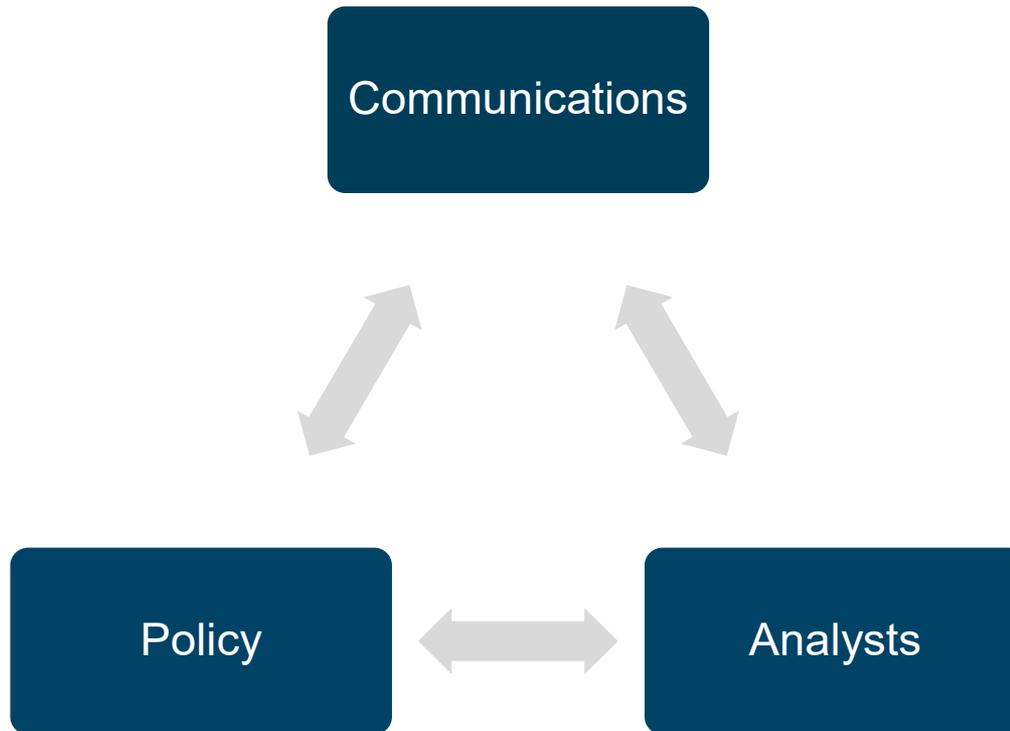
Decisions about the publication of statistics and data, such as content and timing, should be independent of political influence.



Benefits

- **Public conversations focus on the important issues** – rather than about a lack of transparency which can result in confusion about where numbers come from or accusations that governments cherry pick or manipulate data
- Organisations which communicate using data and statistics **demonstrate trustworthiness**

The importance of collaboration for trustworthy communication



Top tips for trustworthy communication

1. **Speak to your Head of Profession for Statistics, or other analytical colleagues**, for advice on how to present numbers fairly in any external communications
2. Check whether the figures you are using are already **available in the public domain** and make sure you provide a **source**
3. Find out if there are any important **caveats or limitations** which should be highlighted alongside the figures
4. For **infographics or visuals**, can they be understood when viewed in isolation?

B

B

C

Official stop and search figures published with 'dodgy' warning

	E	F	G	H
Home Office: Stop and Search under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 and resultant arrests, England and Wales				
Detailed information on the data is provided in the notes worksheet.				
	Resultant arrests			
Arrests	For offensive weapons		Arrest rate (%)	
2018	203	485	4	
2019	356	2,143	6	
2020	299	1,248	4	
2021	256	958	3	
2022	192	1,522	5	

Author:
Reason for arrest data is dodgy so maybe we shouldn't publish it

So back to those giraffes...



Supporting trustworthy communication

We have resources to help support impactful communications:

- We have created [senior leader](#) and a [comms specific Code guidance note](#)
- Our staff write blogs to help communicators eg – [Talking Numbers and Making Them Count](#)
- We also host annual awards with the Royal Statistical Society and Civil Service World, to recognise good practice in [official statistics](#) and [promote voluntary adoption of TQV](#)



Let's continue the conversation

Find out more and get in touch:

OSR website: <https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/>

Contact us: Suzanne.halls@statistics.gov.uk

Find us on Twitter: @StatsRegulation